



Identifying variation in police officer behavior between juveniles and adults

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the basis of officer decision making during encounters with juvenile suspects, and compares these encounters to those between police and adults. Specifically, two types of officer behavior are examined: the decision to arrest, and the exercise of authority. Officer behavior during encounters with juvenile suspects is compared and contrasted to encounters with adult suspects. Results from multivariate analyses find juveniles are significantly more likely to be arrested than adults; however, officers do not exercise different levels of authority during interactions with juvenile suspects. Results also indicate that the factors shaping officer behavior varies across age of suspect, namely, the community context and officer's race offer significantly different influences on juveniles than on adults. Other factors also influence officer discretion differently depending on the age of the suspect, most noteworthy being disrespectful demeanor. The results indicate that police officer behavior during encounters with juvenile suspects is very different than during encounters with adults.

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Introduction

How officers and juveniles interact has been the focus of much academic attention over the past several decades (Black & Reiss, 1970; Carr, Napolitano, & Keating, 2007; Lundman, Sykes, & Clark, 1978; Piliavin & Briar, 1964). Age has typically been viewed as one of several basic characteristics that shape officer decision making, especially when the citizen is under the age of eighteen. It has been theorized that youthful suspects will be more likely than adults to receive sanctions by street-level officers after holding other factors constant. Whether in a given situation this is due to differences in officer perceptions of the behavior of juveniles versus adults, differences in the role police occupy when encountering juveniles or the level of community supervision directed at juveniles remains an empirical question. What is known is that occupational and social factors suggest there may be differences in the processes officers on the street use to regulate and handle public conduct with juveniles in comparison to adults.

First, based on beliefs about differences in the development of adults and juveniles, officers may perceive behavior by juveniles as being more troublesome than similar conduct by adults. For instance, Black (1976) posited that juveniles are less respectable than older persons; juveniles pose a greater threat to officers, and thus are more likely to receive formal application of law. Youthful offenders may be more prone to be noncompliant with officer requests (McCluskey,

Mastrofski, & Parks, 1999) because juveniles may be more irrational and less fearful of officer authority (Muir, 1977). Finally, juveniles may be more vulnerable to peer-pressure than adults and may be more likely to engage in threatening behavior. Officers may view the conduct of juveniles as symbolically more serious than if the behavior was committed by an adult, thus juveniles who are out late at night, look suspicious, and disrespect officers may be perceived as worthy of being encountered and taken into custody (Allen, 2005).

Second, juvenile involvement in crime and suspicious behavior frequently places police and juveniles in contact with one another, and more importantly, contact that is often adversarial and antagonistic. Officers recognize that offending is concentrated among those youth who have yet to age-out of crime. Juveniles commit a substantial portion of reported crime (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999) and account for a significant proportion of the contacts police have with the public (Geistman & Smith, 2007; Walker & Katz, 2008). Also, the past several decades have witnessed an increase in the formal processing of juveniles by the system. Whether this is due to changes in the nature of juvenile offending or the system being more willing to intervene and hold the juvenile accountable has been debated (Feld, 2003). In either case, police as gatekeepers of the criminal justice system, and protectors of community safety, are required to interact with juveniles and make decisions about how best to handle youth.

Third, the police response may be further complicated by the conflicting roles officers assume with juveniles, namely, law enforcer versus maintaining order versus helping the child (Bazemore & Senjo, 1997; Walker & Katz, 2008). In addition to more traditional law enforcement or order maintenance activities, officers are also required

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to intervene where children are involved to protect them from being harmed (such as in domestic conflicts, or abusive homes), to prevent them from becoming delinquent by providing child related services (i.e., anti-gang and anti-drug programs), and have cooperated with other community service providers to provide enhanced services to troubled youth (Bannister, Carter, & Schafer, 2001; Giblin, 2002; Withrow & Bolin, 2005). This poses a difficult task for the police and often involves conflicting options that do not arise for adult suspects. Collectively, this suggests that officers may perceive suspicious or criminal conduct by juveniles as being qualitatively different than if similar behavior was committed by an adult and may engage in different responses ranging from issuing warnings to arrest.

While there is limited information on whether officers select different strategies with adults and juveniles, it is known that attitudes of youth are influenced by their encounters with the police. Juveniles report direct and vicarious peer experiences with the police that are coercive, highly negative, and arguably discriminatory, and such encounters are correlated with juveniles holding less favorable or supportive views of police [than adults do]. Extant research consistently indicates that police contact with juveniles influences their attitudes toward the police, and juvenile contact with the police is generally associated with more negative attitudes toward them (Brunson & Miller, 2006; Carr et al., 2007; Hurst, 2007; Hurst & Frank, 2000; Leiber, Nalla, & Farnworth, 1998). One thing that remains unclear is whether juveniles are truly treated differently, if they experience more coercive or authoritative control during street-level encounters with police officers, or if their experiences mirror the experiences of adults confronted by the police.

While it is presumed that citizen age influences officer behavior, there is a lack of consensus on how age shapes officer decision making when it comes to arrest and whether coercion is used during an encounter. Drawing conclusions from the empirical research is complicated because age is introduced as either one of many explanatory variables, or it is operationalized in a manner that is not consistent across studies. Even less is known about how officers and juveniles interact when there is no formal application of law during the interaction (i.e., arrest, citation, official reports). While it is easy to assume that suspect age influences officer behavior, and that juveniles are treated differently than adults in police-public encounters, the empirical research to date does not consistently or adequately support such assumptions.

The current article is in a position to contribute to the discourse on officer behavior during encounters with juveniles [and adults]. First, it operationalizes age status in a manner that compares juveniles (suspects under the age of eighteen) to adults. Second, it utilizes data collected during systematic social observations of the police within a single city during encounters with adult and juvenile populations, hence permitting comparisons between these groups across theoretically relevant correlates of behavior. Third, it examines a variety of police behaviors, beginning with the arrest dichotomy, but continuing with a measure of authoritative police actions that may reasonably vary across adult and juvenile populations.

Age and officer behavior

Considerable existing research examines the factors that influence the exercise of discretion by street-level officers, particularly when it comes to arrest and the use of coercive force, though more recent studies had examined the range of discretionary strategies available to officers when they encounter citizens. Most models that have been constructed to explain these street-level decisions have included citizen age as one of many explanatory variables. Interpretations of these findings range from no effect for juvenile or “youthful” status, to significant citizen age effects that are indistinguishable from findings on what influences officer behavior with adults.

Some research has found that age does not influence discretionary dispositions. Lundman (1974) found no statistically significant

difference in the arrest rates of juveniles and adults after taking other factors like race, location, and social class into consideration. Similarly, Smith and Visher (1981) and Smith, Visher, and Davidson (1984) found suspect age to be unrelated to the decision to arrest a suspect. More recently, Sun and Payne (2004) determined that citizen age provided no explanatory value when considering other discretionary choices of officers, including a variety of coercive actions like arrest, citation, use of verbal warnings, etc. Furthermore, they found citizen age had no effect on officer use of supportive actions.

Researchers focusing solely on samples comprised of youthful citizens have found that legal factors, such as the seriousness of a juvenile's offense, and extralegal factors, such as race, complainant preference, and juvenile disrespect, influence the level of authority and punitiveness exercised by officers (Black & Reiss, 1970; Lundman et al., 1978; Piliavin & Briar, 1964). Myers (2002) found offense seriousness and hostile demeanor each significantly increased the overall exercise of police authority towards juveniles, while race was unrelated to officer behavior. Liederbach (2007) reported police officers exercised a great deal of leniency during encounters with juvenile suspects, perhaps because the types of offenses were typically minor in nature. He also indicated, however, officers responded more formally when the offense was alcohol or drug related, or when there was more physical evidence linking the juvenile with a specific crime. Additionally, juveniles who demonstrated hostile demeanor were more likely to be arrested by the officer.

These findings are congruent with observations of police encounters with adult populations, and are among the most common correlates examined when explaining officer behavior (see Riksheim & Chermak, 1993; Sherman, 1980). The extant research provides an understanding of variation in arrest decision making during encounters with juveniles, but no research exists that directly compares police behavior toward juvenile suspects and their adult counterparts.

Significant effects have been found for age when age was not the primary focus of the research study. For instance, Visher (1983) found younger female suspects were more likely to be arrested, though no such relationship was observed for younger males. Mastrofski, Worden, and Snipes (1995) and Novak, Frank, Smith, and Engel (2002) considered the impact of age using a community policing backdrop. After partitioning the data to officers with positive and negative attitudes toward community policing, Mastrofski et al. (1995) found that juveniles were more likely to be arrested only by officers who held negative attitudes toward the community policing philosophy. Novak et al. (2002), while comparing community officers to traditional beat officers, determined that encounters involving juveniles were more likely to end in arrest regardless of the officer's work assignment. Brown (2005) examined the influence of suspect race on whether an officer made an arrest while controlling for age and other theoretically relevant factors. Juveniles (suspects under the age of eighteen) were significantly more likely to be arrested, and Black juveniles were 3.7 times more likely to be arrested than Black adults. Brown and Frank's (2006) research focusing on the variation in arrest decisions based on officer race indicated that during encounters involving Black officers, juveniles were 9.2 times more likely than adults to be arrested, whereas White officers were 2.7 times more likely to arrest juveniles than adults. Brown and Frank (2005, p. 445) reported juvenile status influenced degrees of punitive actions taken by officers in that “[j]juveniles are 4.4 times more likely than adults to be arrested in lieu of being cited.”

Research also indicates officers use more force or coercion during encounters with youthful offenders. Terrill and Mastrofski (2002) considered the impact of situational and officers' characteristics on use of coercion. They operationalized coercion as a four-item index in which greater values indicated more force applied during the encounter, and found younger suspects experienced higher degrees of coercion during encounters with officers. Others found that minority suspects were more likely to experience higher levels of police force and went on to

note that “male, minority, youthful, and lower income suspects were more likely to be on the receiving end of higher levels of police force, net of encounter-level statistical controls” (Terrill & Reisig, 2003, p. 303) regardless of community context. Another study looking at the influence of officer gender on police behavior discovered greater application of force on youthful suspects (Paoline & Terrill, 2005). Even after controlling for theoretically relevant factors, as well as considering environment and officer gender, young suspects are significantly more likely to have force applied during encounters with male and female officers. Likewise, Engel (2000) found youthful suspects were more likely to be the target of force, and to be arrested or issued a citation in lieu of a warning during traffic stops.

This lack of consistent or overwhelming effects for suspect age has led some researchers, including the National Research Council (2004, p. 116), to conclude juvenile status “does not appear to affect police practice, in that patterns of decision making are based on the same criteria and weighted in the same ways.” The authors believe, however, that the collective body of research on officer behavior supports the premise that an inverse relationship between suspect age and punitive police action exists: all else being equal, juveniles are treated differently—more punitively—than adults. Inconsistencies in the operationalization of citizen age, limited comparisons between juvenile and adult samples, and variation in outcome measures have made it difficult to understand the extent to which age shapes officers’ decision making. Accordingly, concluding that citizen age, specifically juvenile status, does not influence officer behavior in street-level encounters may be premature.

Limits of existing research

At least three limitations exist within the extant literature. First, previous studies have operationalized age in a variety of manners which makes it difficult to determine whether officers behave differently with juveniles—persons under the age of eighteen—versus “younger” people. Most research utilized ordinal scales with lower values corresponding with younger suspects. Even here there is a lack of consistency. Some studies had utilized a three-category scale where the lowest measure included those nineteen and under (Smith & Visher, 1981; Smith et al., 1984; Visher, 1983). Others had used an eight-item ordinal measurement where the lowest categories include suspects five years of age and lower; six to twelve years old, and thirteen to seventeen years old (Engel, 2000; Engel, Sobol, & Worden, 2000; Paoline & Terrill, 2005; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002; Terrill & Reisig, 2003). None of the aforementioned studies utilized the scaled measures of age to create a category of “juveniles,” which means their age-related finding can only be discussed in terms of “younger” suspects relative to “older” suspects. Meanwhile, others had used dichotomous measures where the suspect was under eighteen years of age (Brown, 2005; Brown & Frank, 2005, 2006; Novak et al., 2002), under twenty-one years of age (Mastrofski et al., 1995), under twenty-five years of age (Lundman, 1974), or aged eighteen to twenty-nine (Sun & Payne, 2004). Variation in the operationalization of age makes it difficult to compare results across studies, even when these studies utilized similar types of data (i.e., observation data) or even the same set of data.

Second, existing research has not systematically examined whether the factors commonly associated with officer decision making involving adult suspects operate in the same fashion during police contacts with juveniles. Research on officer behavior during encounters with juveniles has either (a) focused solely on police-juvenile encounters, or (b) introduced suspect age only as an explanatory variable in their examinations. In other words, the empirical research is based on juvenile only samples or mixed-age samples where age is generally utilized as a control variable. The aforementioned analytic approaches are accepted techniques for assessing whether age influences discretionary choices, but they do not allow one to address whether the factors that shape decision making for adults are the same

as those for juveniles. In order to understand whether officer decision making during encounters with juveniles is similar to adults, separate models must be estimated using data collected in a single site, involving the same officers, and contain consistent operationalizations of variables.¹

Third, the relevant literature has been preoccupied with arrest and the use of force. It is important to recognize arrest and use of force as merely two options in the range of discretionary choices available to street-level officers. Greater specification in officer behavior has been offered by Terrill and Reisig (2003) and Paoline and Terrill (2004) who provided a continuum for coercion/use of force. Klinger (1996a) and Sun and Payne (2004) provided indices on coercive actions, including arrest and some forms of physical force, which gives researchers the ability to examine low visibility decisions made in police-public encounter. Policing scholars recognize that examining officer decision making other than arrest is important to understanding police interactions with the public (Terrill & Paoline, 2007). More refined measures of officer behavior are better suited to capture the various ways officers behave during encounters generally, and with juveniles in particular.

Measuring police authority

No matter how short-lived or trivial the interaction between a police officer and suspect may seem, governmental social control (law) is exercised whenever officers and suspects interact in order maintenance and law enforcement capacities regardless of the eventual outcome (Black, 1976, 1980; Worden, 1989). “Understanding all police conduct as formal authority and thinking of specific actions in terms of the level of formal authority they mobilize provide the conceptual basis for quantifying law in police citizen encounters” (Klinger, 1996a, p. 398). The legal authority given to police, combined with the discretionary nature of street-level policing activities, empowers officers to ask suspects questions, give orders, search suspects, and render sanctions that involve other mechanisms of social control through the filing of reports, the issuance of a citation, and/or making a full-custody arrest (Goldstein, 1960; Lipsky, 1980; Wilson, 1968).

Officers take informal actions (such as providing suggestions or verbal warnings) to address suspect behaviors, and they can also take more formal actions (like filing an official report, issuing a citation, or making a full-custody arrest) to deal with situations. The distinction between informal and formal actions is that formal acts bring suspects and their conduct to the attention of other agencies or institutions, which often have legal or other consequences, while informal actions typically have no such effect (Black, 1976, 1980). Collectively, such activities can be considered a continuum of coercion used to rank-order degrees of social control, tapping into the varying amount of authority exercised by the police, with one action representing more social control than the preceding action (Klinger, 1996a; Myers, 2002). For example, an arrest represents the use of more authority than a citation, a citation is more than a written report, and a physical search is more than a verbal request for information.

Building upon rationales and examples from research on quantifying police behavior beyond arrest or the use of physical force (Black, 1980; Klinger, 1996a; Myers, 2002; Sun & Payne, 2004; Sykes & Brent, 1983; Worden, 1989), police exercise of authority with juvenile and adult suspects is examined with three criteria in mind: (1) the formal and informal nature of police actions, (2) the potential severity of distinct police actions for the suspect, and (3) the intrusiveness of police actions into the life of the suspect in the encounter. For instance, there is little question that an arrest is a formal police action that deprives suspects of their liberty with potentially severe consequences, such as financial penalties and/or prolonged restrictions of liberty. Among the actions examined in this study, arrest clearly represented the highest degree of formal authority: arrest involves all three of the ranking scheme criteria to their fullest degree. Other police actions vary, however, in how they measure up to the aforementioned criteria.

Police actions that bring a citizen to the attention of the justice system (e.g., receiving a ticket or official report) represent more severe outcomes than actions that do not facilitate further processing by the system (e.g., a verbal warning). Police actions that more or less settle matters between a suspect and an officer on the street (such as a verbal warning or a citation) represent less use of authority and are less severe than settlements in more formal settings (such as a police station after an arrest). As the formality and severity of police actions increase, citizen exposure to other penalties or forms of social control also increases.

Taking into account the intrusiveness of the action into the suspect's life is also important. For instance, officers use a variety of tactics to gather information from a suspect. Gathering information from a suspect by asking questions is not as intrusive as detaining the person to check for prior involvement with the criminal justice system, which is still less intrusive than a physical search of a suspect. Therefore, as the intrusiveness of the action increases so does the degree of police authority. By examining the range of alternatives available to officers for controlling citizen behavior, including low visibility behaviors, it is possible to determine whether officer interactions with juveniles differ from interactions with adults.

With this in mind, four research hypotheses are addressed:

Hypothesis 1. A positive relationship exists between juvenile status and arrest.

Hypothesis 2. A positive relationship exists between juvenile status and officer exercise of authority.

Hypothesis 3. Correlates of arrest differ between juveniles and adults.

Hypothesis 4. Correlates of the exercise of authority differ between juveniles and adults.

Methods

Data for this study were collected through systematic social observations of street level officers of the Cincinnati Police Division (CPD) between April 1997 and April 1998.² The CPD was a police agency of roughly 1,000 sworn officers in 1997. Following the data collection methodologies of other observation projects such as the Police Services Study and Project on Policing Neighborhoods, coding instruments were used to systematically structure observations and the collection of necessary information to explore the variance in the behavior of police officers. Trained graduate student observers accompanied police officers during randomly selected shifts and recorded everything the officers did during their normal work shift. Observers completed a training course designed to ensure the collection of reliable and valid data. All observers were trained on how to collect and code social observations in a systematic fashion. The primary purpose of the training was to induce uniformity and reliability between observers on how to categorize the social world of police officers.³

Data on citizen characteristics, such as gender, race, approximate age, and whether they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol, were collected. The observational data also contained contextual information on where the encounter took place (e.g., whether it occurred in a public or private setting and neighborhood characteristics), the actions taken by the officer and the citizen while in the presence of one another (such as whether either party was hostile or antagonistic to the other), and other characteristics of the encounter (e.g., the severity of the alleged citizen behavior that prompted the encounter and the presence of other officers or citizen bystanders). In order to identify structural differences in neighborhoods where encounters occurred, data were collected from the 1990 U.S. Census at the block-group level. This was necessary as definitions of community

boundaries (and CPD beats) were identified at this level of analysis. These data (systematic social observations of police officers and census information) allowed for the examination of arrest outcomes and the possible influence of suspect age status on officer use of authority.

Dependent variables

Two outcome measures were used to address the question of whether there are differences in officer use of coercive actions based on a suspect's age status. The first was a dichotomous measure, no arrest/arrest, and the second was a Police Authority Scale (PAS) similar to the behavioral scale used by Sun and Payne (2004) (see also, Klinger, 1996a).

Whereas the first dependent variable was a measure of the highest degree of authority used against a suspect (e.g., arrest), the PAS recognizes that suspects potentially experience coercion additively (Sun & Payne, 2004). Exclusive focus on a single category or the most severe form of police coercion, such as arrest, dismisses the reality that officers use multiple tactics, sometimes formal and informal, during their interactions with suspects (Bayley, 1986). Such a measure may be important when attempting to understand the subtle differences in how officers exercise authority when interacting with juveniles (versus adults).

The PAS is a nine-category, rank-ordered continuum of common coercive actions available to officers during encounters with suspects. In ascending order of severity, the nine measured actions are (0) an officer was in the suspect's presence, a residual category where an officer exerted no authority implied beyond a police presence, (1) gathering information from a suspect through general questioning (e.g., "What are you doing," "What happened," etc.), (2) suggesting or advising a suspect to do something, (3) commanding a suspect to do something or threatening negative consequences for noncompliance with an officer's wishes, (4) performing a criminal history check, and (5) performing a physical search of a suspect or their immediate property (e.g., a vehicle). These five measures are informal, low-visibility police actions. Formal actions entailed (6) filing or promising to file an official report regarding the suspect's conduct or status, (7) issuing the suspect a citation, and (8) making a full-custody arrest (Klinger, 1996a; Sun & Payne, 2004). The scale scores were constructed by adding the number of points assigned to each police action used against a suspect (Black, 1980). This allows coercion to be examined as an interval measure, a police authority scale score ranging from 0 to 36, with higher values indicating more use of authority against a suspect. For example, if an officer tells a suspect to cease disorderly behavior or face consequences (3), then conducts a check for warrants against a suspect (4) and the suspect is ultimately arrested (8), the PAS score would be a value of fifteen (3 + 4 + 8).

Only persons considered to be suspects by the observed police officers at some point in the encounters were included in this analysis; thus, this study was being conducted at the suspect level of analysis (N = 617). Since differential treatment of suspects based on their age status was the primary focus of the analyses, descriptive statistics are presented and the results from the multivariate analyses in the context of juveniles versus adults. There were 442 encounters between police and adult suspects, and 175 police–juvenile suspect encounters. Only 106 suspects in the sample were arrested; 15.4 percent of the adult suspects were arrested and 21.7 percent of the police encounters with juveniles resulted in an arrest. Table 1 contains descriptive statistics on the variables and all police actions taken against the study sample.

Independent variables

Prior research on officer behavior during encounters with citizens has identified a number of theoretically relevant control variables which were included in the models. Several situational variables were

Table 1
Descriptive statistics.

	Values	All suspects		Adult suspects		Juvenile suspects	
		n = 617		n = 442		n = 175	
		Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
<i>Dependent variables</i>							
Arrest	0 = no 1 = yes	0.17	0.38	0.15	0.36	0.22	0.41
Police authority scale (additive index 0–36)	0 = presence 1 = gathering information 2 = suggestion 3 = command/threat 4 = prior record check 5 = search 6 = report 7 = citation 8 = custodial arrest	12.68	8.40	12.72	8.13	12.57	9.24
<i>Independent variables</i>							
Juvenile suspect	0 = adult 1 = under 18 years of age	0.28	0.45				
Black suspect	0 = non-Black 1 = Black	0.64	0.48	0.60	0.49	0.71	0.46
Female suspect	0 = male 1 = female	0.27	0.44	0.29	0.45	0.23	0.42
Intoxicated	0 = no 1 = yes	0.15	0.36	0.19	0.39	0.06	0.24
Disrespectful	0 = deferential 1 = disrespectful	0.16	0.37	0.17	0.38	0.14	0.35
Interaction-phase crime	0 = no 1 = yes	0.06	0.25	0.06	0.23	0.09	0.28
Citizen preference	0 = no preference 1 = preference for arrest	0.04	0.20	0.05	0.22	0.01	0.10
Offense seriousness	0 = no crime 1 = misdemeanor/minor crime 2 = felony/serious crime	0.55	0.66	0.60	0.68	0.42	0.61
Quantity of evidence	0 = no evidence observed 1 = one evidence criterion 2 = two evidence criterion 3 = three evidence criterion 4 = four evidence criterion	1.21	0.12	1.21	1.17	1.23	1.02
Black officer	0 = non-Black 1 = Black	0.41	0.49	0.39	0.49	0.46	0.50
Community distress	Factor	1.97	0.91	1.99	0.93	1.94	0.87

used for explanatory or control purposes. Citizen characteristics were all measured as dichotomous variables: juvenile status (0 = adult, 1 = under eighteen years of age),⁴ race (0 = non-Black, 1 = Black), and gender (0 = male and 1 = female). Other variables indicate whether there were visible signs of citizen intoxication due to either alcohol or drugs (0 = no signs of intoxication and 1 = any signs of intoxication on the part of the citizen) and whether the suspect was deferential to the officer. Citizen demeanor was measured as whether citizens were civil or deferential to officers (0) or if they were moderately or highly disrespectful to the police during the encounter (1).⁵ In addition to citizen demeanor, it was important to control for criminal behavior committed in the presence of the officer (Engel et al., 2000; Klingler, 1994, 1996a, 1996b; Worden & Shepard, 1996). In accordance with this research, a control variable (interaction-phase crime) was included (0 = no crime, 1 = a criminal act committed by the citizen in the presence of the observed officer).

Two legal variables were used in this analysis: offense seriousness and quantity of evidence. Offense seriousness pertains to the

criminal act in which the citizen was allegedly involved and was the reason for the encounter with the observed police officer. Offenses were measured on a three-point ordinal scale, where 0 = no offense, 1 = misdemeanors/minor offenses, and 2 = felonies/serious offenses. The evidence variable measured the quantity of evidence available to the officer indicating that the citizen had committed a criminal offense. It is an additive scale involving different types of evidence: (1) whether the officer observed the citizen engage in an illegal act or viewed circumstantial evidence of an illegal act, (2) whether the officer observed physical evidence that implicated the citizen in an offense, (3) whether the officer heard claims from others which implicated the citizen in an offense, and (4) whether the officer heard the citizen confess to the offense. A point was calculated for each of the four criteria present in the encounter. Therefore, evidence was measured on a scale from 0 to 4, with higher values indicating higher quantities of evidence (Novak et al., 2002).⁶ Whether a victim or another citizen preferred an arrest be made (0 = no preference, 1 = preferred arrest be made) was introduced for statistical control.

The final two correlates used in the analyses were officer race (0 = White officer and 1 = Black officer) and community distress. Data were collected on several neighborhood characteristics, such as the poverty level, racial composition, proportion of renter-occupied households, and the proportion of single-family households. These variables were factor analyzed to avoid problems associated with multicollinearity among community-level variables. Principal components factor analysis indicated that the community-level variables tapped the same dimension, with the eigenvalue equal to 3.129. As such, these variables were combined into one factor score representing community disorganization.⁷ The total item inter-correlation suggests there was internal consistency with these four items (Cronbach's standardized alpha = 0.906) and that they tapped the same underlying construct. The items addressing community distress loaded on the factor between 0.815 and 0.946.

Results

The analytical strategy was similar for each dependent variable. First, full models for each dependent variable (i.e., arrest and PAS) were estimated. Second, disaggregated samples were estimated in order to examine and compare the influence of factors on officer decision making with juveniles versus adults. Finally, a comparison of coefficients was calculated to determine whether variables differed significantly between the aggregated models.

Table 2 provides logistical regression results where the dichotomous measure of arrest was regressed against the exogenous variables.⁸ Model A contains the results for both adults and juveniles. The findings indicated a positive relationship between juvenile status and arrest: all else being equal, juveniles were significantly more likely to be arrested than adults. Other factors that increased the likelihood of arrest included when the suspect was Black, male, intoxicated, disrespectful, when a crime was committed in the officer's presence, when the offense was more serious, when there was more evidence of a crime, and when the officer was White. Overall, these results appeared to be consistent with much of the extant research on arrest decision making.

Also included in Table 2 are disaggregated models for adult and juvenile suspects. Model B provides the results for adult suspects, while Model C contains the regression estimates for juvenile suspects. As can be seen from the table, a number of the variables provided predictive value in both models. Specifically, officers were significantly more likely to arrest suspects irrespective of age status who were intoxicated, when there was an interaction phase crime, as seriousness of the offense and quantity of available evidence increased, and when the officer was White. At the same time, there were three variables that were significant for officer arrest decisions

Table 2
Logistic regression models predicting arrest.

	Direct model		Disaggregated models				t
	All suspects		Adult suspects		Juvenile suspects		
	Model A		Model B		Model C		
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	
Juvenile suspect	1.043***	0.296					
Black suspect	0.878**	0.294	1.039**	0.371	0.598	0.562	
Female suspect	-1.332***	0.380	-1.882***	0.554	-0.961	0.621	
Intoxicated	1.668***	0.326	1.697***	0.383	1.557*	0.799	
Disrespectful	1.020**	0.326	1.219**	0.432	0.859	0.571	
Interaction-phase crime	1.564***	0.41	1.856**	0.597	1.475*	0.666	
Citizen prefers arrest	0.829	0.554	1.075	0.604	-1.147	1.833	
Offense seriousness	1.301***	0.205	1.291***	0.254	1.645***	0.416	
Quantity of evidence	0.480***	0.122	0.538***	0.159	0.478*	0.233	
Black officer	-0.969***	0.291	-1.235**	0.398	-1.106*	0.549	
Community distress	-0.053	0.141	-0.443*	0.180	0.836**	0.284	3.803
Constant	-4.181***	0.484	-3.576***	0.578	-4.861***	0.915	
N	617		442		175		
-2 log likelihood	389.596		239.306		129.685		
Nagelkerke R-square	0.414		0.472		0.406		

* p<.05.
** p<.01.
*** p<.001.

with adults that were not significant predictors of officer arrest decisions with juveniles. Contrary to the findings for adults, disrespectful juveniles were no more likely to be arrested than those not demonstrating this behavior. A juvenile's race and gender were unrelated to the likelihood of arrest. Finally, the variable operationalizing community distress, while significant in both models, exerted opposite effects in the adult and juveniles equations.

The final column of Table 2 compares coefficients⁹ between Models B and C for the influence of community distress, utilizing the equation suggested by Clogg, Petkova, and Haritou (1995). The resulting estimate examines whether significant differences between the models exist on this independent measure. A t-value of 3.803 is observed, indicating the influence of neighborhood distress has a significantly different influence on the likelihood of arrest for juveniles than adults.

Table 3 provides model estimates where the PAS is regressed against the same predictor variables as in Table 2. Model D provides the estimates for all suspects in the study, and unlike the arrest model, juvenile status was unrelated to the quantity of authority exercised by the officer. Officers exercised more authority when the suspect was male, intoxicated, disrespectful, when a crime was committed in their presence, the offense was more serious, there was more evidence of criminal activity, the officer was White, and when the community had lower levels of distress.

The findings for Models E and F indicate that there were differences in the variables influencing the quantity of authority exercised by officers when they interact with adults versus juveniles. Specifically, the equation estimates for adult suspects indicate that officers exercise more authority during encounters with males, the intoxicated, when crimes are committed in the officer's presence, during encounters involving increased crime seriousness and quantity of evidence, and during encounters within less distressed communities (Model E). In contrast, only three variables are significant in the juvenile-specific model for police use of authoritative action. While seriousness of the offense increased the quantity of authority similar

to adults, it is the only variable that is significant with both samples. Juveniles also experienced greater levels of authority when they were considered to be disrespectful and during encounters with White officers. Other independent variables provided no significant predictive value in understanding the exercise of authority between police and juvenile suspect populations.

Finally, t-values are presented in the final column for coefficients demonstrating significantly different effects between adults and juveniles. Whereas officer race does not influence the exercise of authority with adults, White officers were significantly more likely to demonstrate authority when encountering juveniles (t = 2.493). Also, community distress provided different effects between models: where adults in less-distressed communities experience higher levels of authority during police encounters, neighborhood distress exhibited no significant effect on police use of authority with juveniles (t = 2.779). Comparing the results from these estimates (Table 3) to those provided in Table 2, it is apparent the predictor variables do not explain as much variance in either the adult (.472 versus .327) or juvenile (.406 versus .134) models, or the direct model (.414 versus .249). This appears to suggest the factors that predict arrest provide less utility when attempting to understand variation in a more robust authority scale.

Discussion

This study examined officer behavior during encounters with juvenile suspects, with particular interest in determining whether officers respond to the same cues during encounters with juveniles and adult populations. To accomplish this, direct models were estimated utilizing the conventional arrest/no arrest dichotomy and a more robust measure of officer behavior. In contrast to previous research, this study also examined a series of disaggregated models where juvenile suspect populations were compared to adult suspects. Four research hypotheses guided the analysis, and each is discussed below, with a focus on the findings pertaining to juveniles.

Table 3
OLS models predicting use of authority.

	Direct model		Disaggregated models				t
	All suspects		Adult suspects		Juvenile suspects		
	Model D		Model E		Model F		
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	
Juvenile suspect	1.095	0.680					
Black suspect	0.813	0.630	0.567	0.664	1.561	1.530	
Female suspect	-1.892**	0.677	-1.758*	0.721	-2.589	1.568	
Intoxicated	5.332***	0.857	5.475***	0.850	3.429	2.744	
Disrespectful	1.795*	0.853	1.304	0.916	4.450*	2.074	
Interaction-phase crime	2.524*	1.275	2.988*	1.529	0.530	2.429	
Citizen prefers arrest	1.683	1.523	1.652	1.452	-3.742	6.505	
Offense seriousness	3.858***	0.474	3.950***	0.495	3.955***	1.186	
Quantity of evidence	1.388***	0.278	1.574***	0.288	0.426	0.698	
Black officer	-1.365*	0.620	-0.447	0.672	-4.409**	1.440	2.493
Community distress	-0.643*	0.326	-1.201***	0.345	1.135	0.769	2.779
Constant	9.059***	0.957	9.666***	1.020	8.872***	2.040	
N	617		442		175		
Adjusted R-square	0.249		0.327		0.134		

* p<.05.
** p<.01.
*** p<.001.

A positive relationship between juvenile status and arrest was hypothesized, and *this hypothesis was supported*. Officers were significantly more likely to arrest juvenile suspects net other effects, and the findings were consistent with much of the extant research that finds age influences decision making (i.e., Brown, 2005; Brown & Frank, 2005, 2006; Mastrofski et al., 1995; Novak et al., 2002; Visser, 1983).

A positive relationship between juvenile status and officer exercise of authority was also hypothesized. Using the police authority scale, *the analysis did not support this hypothesis*. The direct effects equation indicated that officers are no more likely to demonstrate higher levels of authority during encounters with juveniles. Thus, age-status influences the decision to formally initiate the justice system process, though officers are no more or less likely to demonstrate variation in the amount of authority based on the age status of the individual.

Turning attention to the common factors used to explain officer behavior, a difference between juveniles and adults in the correlates that influence arrest was hypothesized. *This hypothesis was supported*. Certain characteristics consistently influenced the decision to arrest across disaggregated models, including offense seriousness, quantity of evidence, commission of crimes in the presence of an officer, officer race (White), and intoxication. The presence of each of these factors during encounters significantly increased the probability of arrest regardless of suspect's age. At the same time, differences were observed in the predictive power of several of the correlates. Adults encountered in less distressed communities were significantly more likely to be arrested, while juveniles encountered in communities with greater levels of distress were significantly more likely to be arrested. A comparison of coefficients revealed that the contextual effect of environment was significantly different for adult and juvenile populations.

Three correlates did not demonstrate significantly different influences across the arrest models; however, the substantive differences warrant discussion. In each situation the correlate increased the likelihood of arrest for adults, but was not statistically significant in the juvenile only arrest model. Specifically, male adults were significantly more likely to be arrested than females, but no such relationship was observed for juveniles. Also, disrespectful adults were more likely to be arrested, while disrespect did not significantly increase the likelihood of arrest for juveniles. Black juveniles were no more likely to be arrested than their White counterparts. This was in contrast to earlier findings reported by Piliavin and Briar (1964), Black and Reiss (1970), Lundman et al. (1978), and Brown (2005) (c.f., Myers, 2002), and in contrast to the findings for adults. In sum, there exists significant and substantive variation in an officer's decision to arrest a suspect across age.

Finally, a difference between juveniles and adults in the correlates that influence officer exercise of authority in general was hypothesized. *This hypothesis was supported*. Two correlates demonstrated significantly different influences across the conditional models: community distress and officer race. Community distress did not impact the exercise of authority (PAS) during encounters with juveniles, yet significantly more authority was exercised with adults who encountered the police in less distressed areas. For juveniles, officer use of authority did not vary across environmental context. Furthermore, unlike adults, intoxicated juveniles experienced no greater authoritative actions than nonintoxicated juveniles, because the condition of intoxication was more akin to a legal variable than an extralegal variable for juveniles. It is illegal for juveniles to be intoxicated and those who are intoxicated are more likely to be arrested. Intoxicated juveniles are likely to be arrested in part because of their illegal behavior, and thus are not subject to the range of other authoritative actions. For adults, however, intoxication is legal under many conditions, thus explaining their increased propensity to be confronted by arrest as well

as increased use of authority. This supports previous findings by Liederbach (2007) who found involvement with drugs or alcohol increased the chances of juveniles being arrested by the police.

The findings indicate that there are some important differences in the factors that influence officer decision making with juveniles compared to adults. Several plausible explanations can be offered for these divergent findings. Arrest appears to be the preferred strategy of police when encountering juvenile suspects. This is especially true for juveniles encountered in distressed neighborhoods. The decision to arrest juveniles is premised to a large extent on the age-status of the citizen and where the encounter occurred. Irrespective of the gender, race, and demeanor, juveniles encountered in more distressed neighborhoods are more likely to be arrested than adults.

When the quantity of authority used to control citizens was examined, differences in the factors used by officers were again observed in the disaggregated models (Models E and F). Where the encounter occurred influenced officer decisions with adults, but not juveniles, as officers were more likely to use more authority in less distressed neighborhoods. At the same time, White officers exercised significantly more authority during encounters with juveniles, and this was not observed for encounters with adults. This was inconsistent with Sun and Payne's (2004) research which utilized a similar measure of police control (coercion). They found that Black officers, not White officers, were more coercive in responding to citizens generally in interpersonal conflicts.

Two findings are worthy of additional discussion. First, an examination of the disaggregated models demonstrated that officer behavior during encounters with disrespectful suspects differed by age. Disrespectful juveniles endured higher levels of police action, but this was not observed during encounters with disrespectful adults. Conversely, disrespect did not influence arrest for juveniles, but disrespectful adults were significantly more likely to be arrested. The arrest/no arrest dichotomy is arguably a "something or nothing" measure of officer decision making, but the police authority scale is a measure of many "somethings." Disrespectful behavior from a juvenile may, in an officer's opinion, warrant some limited corrective action, but arrest may be too severe. This finding may also be an indication of some form of leniency towards juveniles, which would be consistent with the results reported by Myers (2002). Officers may feel that disrespectful adults should know better and adult arrests due to disrespect may be an indication of failing the "asshole" test (Van Maanen, 1978).¹⁰

While officers were not more likely to arrest disrespectful juveniles, they did engage in greater levels of authority. It is likely the case that officers recognize juveniles may be less able to appreciate the consequences of their disrespectful actions, thus are less willing to sanction the juvenile with a formal arrest. Novak and Engel (2005) reported similar findings related to citizens perceived to have a mental disorder. They found that though persons encountered by the police who were perceived to have a mental disorder were more hostile and disrespectful; officers in these encounters were not more likely to arrest the citizen. They reasoned that officers determined the level of culpability and deservedness of the suspect during the encounter, and did not feel formal arrest was a reasonable response in these encounters. Their findings were analogous to what was found here, thus it may appear disrespectful juveniles are being treated leniently. The current results, however, also indicate that officers engage in more actions (as measured by the PAS) during encounters with disrespectful juveniles. Thus officers are responding in a more punitive, albeit less formal manner. Disrespectful juveniles do not appear to be 'let off the hook,' rather they are subjected to greater levels of police scrutiny, and in this way officers sanction the disrespectful juvenile differently than they may the disrespectful adult.

Interest in the influence of citizen disrespect has received increased attention since Klinger (1994) raised concerns over how this construct was operationalized in existing research (Worden & Shepard, 1996). Consistent with Klinger's suggestion, a variable to control for illegal behavior performed in the presence of the officer (interaction-phase crime) was included. This variable provides further insight into police decision making. In the analysis for juvenile arrest outcomes (Model C), criminal conduct in the presence of the officer, not conduct viewed as disrespectful, is what influences the arrest decision. When it comes to exerting greater amounts of police authority, however, officers pay more attention to disrespectful conduct, not criminal offending, in their presence (Model F). Officers appear to sanction juveniles formally, as evidenced by the findings regarding arrest, and the PAS measures officer actions towards disrespectful juveniles in addition to arrest.

Second, community distress influenced officer decisions differently for encounters with juveniles than adults. Though it is difficult to determine exactly why this community distress finding is observed, there are two plausible explanations. First, officers acted with greater vigor during encounters with juveniles in distressed neighborhoods. Juvenile suspects encountered in distressed neighborhoods may represent a symbolic threat to neighborhood well-being, which mobilizes formal police action. Conversely, adults encountered in distressed neighborhoods represented less of a threat to officers and their behavior did not meet the arrest threshold (Klinger, 1997). Second, the decision to arrest juveniles was 'quick,' such that other authoritative actions were unnecessary and therefore unobserved. If arrest is the ultimate sanction during these encounters, it may be unproductive for officers to engage in other coercive acts such as information gathering, commands, or suggestions, which do not always dispose of the situation. For adults, the community's level of distress had very different effects. Specifically, adults in less distressed neighborhoods were more likely to both be arrested and receive higher levels of authority. Adult behavior in these "more organized" neighborhoods may be perceived by officers as incongruent with acceptable norms of behavior and warranting some formal police intervention.

It is clear that officer behavior differs during encounters with juveniles. Not only are juveniles more likely to be arrested, but the factors that influence arrest and the exercise of authority vary considerably. Correlates of officer decision making vary in their explanatory value between the outcome measures, and environmental characteristics consistent with neighborhood distress behave very differently across models. Adults endure significantly less vigorous police behavior in decaying neighborhoods, but juveniles do not. Also, officers respond to citizens demonstrating disrespectful behavior very differently based on age. Only by disaggregating the sample by age were the true influences of disrespect realized. Future research should carefully reconsider the type of behavior exercised by officers during police-public encounters, and for those behaviors that may not involve activation of the justice process (e.g., arrest), latent correlates need to be considered and perhaps discovered. Also, future research needs to more carefully compare and contrast the manner in which officers interact with juvenile and adult populations. Enough significant and substantive differences are demonstrated here, and in the extant research, to assert that juvenile status does appear to affect police practice.

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Notes

1. See Brown and Frank (2006), Spohn (1990), and Steffensmeier and Britt (2001) as examples of similar analytic approaches.

2. Data were collected years before the 2002 urban riots in Cincinnati. Had the observations of police-citizen encounters occurred shortly after this upheaval, the generalizability of these results could be significantly jeopardized. This however was not the case, thus it was reasonable to believe the encounters reported here were generalizable to those in other urban jurisdictions.

3. Prior to conducting ride-a-longs, observers were required to complete a training course over a period of several weeks. In this training, the project and its purposes were described in great detail. Also, information was provided concerning the organizational arrangement of the Cincinnati Police Division. The majority of effort in the training sessions was devoted to reviewing and discussing data coding instruments, and clarifying and interpreting each of the standardized questions. Observers reviewed videotaped activities and encounters of police officers and citizens, and were asked to code the actions viewed videos using the project instruments. Coding decisions were immediately reviewed and discussed by the research team and observers. In addition to these training exercises, each observer was briefed on project confidentiality, and required to complete a form stating that they would not discuss activities observed while on ride-a-longs with personnel not related to the project, and that the discovery by the project staff of impermissible discussions would result in the termination of the observer from the project. This training was conducted in order to standardize coding rules and to increase inter-coder reliability. Over the course of the project, the research team and the observers held meetings and debriefings in order to discuss general operations of the project. During these meetings, the observers communicated coding dilemmas as a group. These issues were addressed and clarified as a group, in the hopes of increasing reliability.

4. Additional detail is deserved regarding how data were collected, given the centrality of this variable. Observers were instructed to determine generally the age of citizens police encountered, and to that end engaged in various tactics to do so. First, because citizens included in this sample were identified as suspects, officers frequently gathered information directly from citizens within the presence of observers. Officers asked "how old are you?" of younger-appearing citizens, or performed records checks where important identifying information (such as date of birth) was obtained. Second, obvious cues of juvenile status were occasionally observed, such as citizens indicating they attended a particular high school. Third, when in doubt, observers would debrief officers as to their knowledge or perception of citizen age. This debriefing process was common and not confined to determining age, as observers would ask officers of their knowledge of citizen race, mental status, level of intoxication, perceived social class, and other potentially subjective features. This process resulted in a valid and reliable determination of whether a citizen was a juvenile.

5. Several other operationalizations of citizen demeanor have been used in the extant research on the influence of demeanor on arrest outcomes. According to Lundman (1994, p. 637), "There is no basis for arguing that one representation is superior to another." In the current data, different measurements of the same construct revealed high levels of inter-correlation. Most recent research has operationalized demeanor as a dichotomous variable, measuring citizen behavior as either polite or disrespectful as the differences in citizen demeanor appear to be a matter "of kind rather than degree" (Worden, Shepard, & Mastrofski, 1996, p. 330). "In other words, ordinal scales may fail to capture the threshold of antagonism that would most likely affect an officer's behavior" (Novak et al., 2002, p. 93).

6. This operationalization of evidence assumes all evidence criterion are given equal explanatory value. In other words, it is a measure of the quantity, not the quality, of evidence. Unfortunately, the existing data did not allow for further analysis of evidence quality. In encounters where the citizen was arrested, observers coded the presence of evidence prior to the arrest.

7. In communities with high crime rates, officers may be more prone to arrest due to perceptions by officers that crime is prevalent in the area and more arrests will deter criminal activity. Klinger (1997) commented, however, that in order for officers to make an arrest, to act with greater vigor or exercise more authority, in communities with high levels of crime, a suspect's behavior must meet a "seriousness threshold." In these communities arrests for minor offenses may not be viewed worth the effort because officers become desensitized by the large amount of crime. Harmful levels of multicollinearity were detected when crime rates were included in the models. As was the case in Novak et al.'s (2002, p. 94) research using the same data, "Communities with high levels of disorganization also had correspondingly high levels of Part I and Part II crimes, therefore making the structural characteristics proxies for aggregate-level crime rates."

8. It was plausible that certain officers within the data could unduly influence the prediction outcomes. The overall number of officer-suspect encounters and the number of encounters per community considerably varied which made it difficult to estimate stable hierarchical models with acceptable levels of bias (Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002). Correlated error terms among officers was a possibility with 14 of the 124 officers in the adult sample (N = 442) and 8 of the 74 officers in the juvenile sample (N = 175). In other words, 21 of the 135 different officers in the total sample accounted for approximately 34 percent of the observations. Approximately 50 percent of the observed encounters occurred in nine of the forty-four neighborhoods in Cincinnati for both samples. Consensus has not been articulated regarding the minimum number of "level 1" observations (police-suspect encounters in this case) necessary to generate stable within- and between-aggregate parameter estimates. Yet there must be enough observations to meet a major assumption of HLM techniques—the assumption of normally distributed error terms within and across levels of analysis—to estimate reliable hierarchical models (see Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Kreft & de Leeuw, 1998). It would be ideal to have data that contained a larger number of observations at all levels, thereby increasing the reliability of parameter estimates from hierarchical modeling,

which is the more appropriate analytical technique for these data. Nevertheless, given the nature of the data, the logistic regression models were also appropriate (Brown & Frank, 2006).

9. Comparisons were made between all variables, but in the interest of parsimony, only the statistically significant differences are reported here.

10. Van Maanen (1978) argued the police tend to identify typologies of citizens within their occupational world and affix convenient labels accordingly. The 'assholes' are those who do not accept the police definition of the situation, and thus the police use this labeling process to socially distance themselves from these citizens, and provides explanation, meaning, and justification to behavior. The asshole represents all persons who question or attempt to control the police, and this label has a shared understanding between officers. Most importantly, however, this label justifies in the officer's mind harsher treatment of the citizen.

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